Putting the parts together

Pieter Wykoff, Guest Writer & Joel Hunt, Central Office

If you didn’t know much about ODOT and were curious about the department’s reason for being, you could browse our website. A few things will pop out at you: We are dedicated to keeping Ohio’s economy moving. We have more than 5000 men and women who make it happen, and they do it by providing an easy conveyance of people and goods from place to place.

If you were really interested, you could take a look at the department’s mission, vision, guiding principles and critical success factors. They talk about being a professional and highly productive organization. Although these are ideals in a perfect world, they talk about a department that will serve, innovate and communicate with purpose in a productive, lean, efficient and effective way. They say as an organization we will define the department’s core functions and eliminate or reduce its non-core functions.

Ok, this is not a perfect world. We all know that. Still, nowhere in the 13-page ODOT Strategic Plan does it say the department will operate 88 in-house part stores across the state using 50 different ODOT and many more DAS contracts with 300 different distributors to maintain the dozens of different cars, trucks and airplanes the department must have to do its job. These vehicles again help keeping Ohio’s economy moving by providing an easy conveyance of people and goods from place to place.

And yet we do. Or at least we have until now. Recently, District 10 became the first district to try and run its parts operation in a more productive, lean, efficient and effective way. The Division of Innovative Delivery hired a private company to order, warehouse, distribute, and monitor parts for its vehicle and aviation parts statewide.

“District 10 will find faster parts turnaround, cost savings, and mechanics turning wrenches instead of pushing paper,” said Jamie Hendershot, District 10 highway management administrator.

Currently most of the parts stores around the state are run mainly by mechanics. They must spend their time looking up parts numbers, placing orders and—in some cases—driving to parts stores to pick up orders, instead of repairing cars, trucks and aircraft. Once the program is implemented statewide, the department’s intent is to find...
meaningful, value-added work for anyone displaced.

And the system is extremely bureaucratic. ODOT mechanics place orders with state-issued Visa payment cards or through purchase orders. Both methods ultimately require the signoff from a district deputy director, Central Office Accounting and finally the Office of Budget Management. Just eliminating all that paperwork will save money.

“We can direct the efforts of the mechanics and whoever else is involved with the parts operation to more meaningful work,” said ODOT Director Jerry Wray. “We want them to focus on our core function, which is taking care of the highway system.”

Once the program is implemented statewide, it’s estimated that ODOT will save $7.1 million each year. In addition, the private firm will assume all risk, monitor manufacturer recalls, provide faster credits on returns, and be open day and night during snow emergencies.

ODOT will work with the private contractor to determine the parts, supplies and equipment to carry in inventory. The contractor will be responsible for all costs associated with providing inventory, delivery of parts to parts stores, transfers of parts between parts stores and all personnel costs and administrative overhead to operate the parts stores.

“When you take on a project this big in scope, there are going to be issues,” said District 10 Management Analyst Supervisor and acting Noble County Manager Ray Henry. “But our team has responded well and are making improvements every day.”

For example, District 10 implemented an electronic parts submission form. Like tracking a FedEx package, this new process allows the mechanics to monitor and track the parts they’ve ordered online. This new process not only enhances accountability but allows mechanics to better plan their repairs.

“We have come a long way, and still have a long way to go until we’re running on all cylinders,” explained Henry, who went on to say that the feedback from this new system has been very positive and well received by the mechanics.

Acting Morgan County Manager Bert Tooms said in order to prepare for the switch, his district had to get its stock of parts down to a manageable level. “We went piece by piece to identify critical parts. Those that were excess or obsolete were either auctioned off or sent to other districts.”

Tooms said not only will the switch save mechanics time and the department money, but it will eliminate waste. “We found stock on shelves for equipment that had been sold five years ago.”

Tooms said the switch has been a challenging process, but it will be easier for the other districts. “We’ve had some bumps and bruises figuring out how to do it, but in the end the other districts should have an easier time of it.” Tooms said the other eleven districts can learn from District 10’s implementation problems.

Julie Brogan, a project manager in the Division of Innovative Delivery, said the department has already begun to roll out the parts initiative to other districts. The division studied several other cities and states to see how they handled their parts purchasing, including the Virginia DOT and the cities of Detroit and Chicago. The division also conducted a cost/benefits analysis comparing our current way of doing business with some of the other methods other cities and states are using.

“People are beginning to embrace this,” she said. “The mission of our division is to find creative ways to save money to raise revenue for our core business, which is building and maintaining our state highway system.”

District 10 will find faster parts turnaround, cost savings, and mechanics turning wrenches instead of pushing paper.

— Jamie Hendershot
BOSTON native Marie Cerda holds a special title at ODOT: Designer. In fact, she’s the department’s one and only.

If you work in Central Office, or in select districts, chances are where you sit and how you move about your office space was her doing.

Trained in residential and commercial design at Hood College in Maryland, Cerda began her career 15 years ago at a private contract furniture dealership in Cleveland. She joined ODOT in 2003.

Cerda says her job is more about creating a functional workspace than making work areas look nice, “although that’s important, too,” she said.

When she’s not at work, Cerda is a competitive runner and spinning instructor.

Having placed in the top third at the LA Marathon in 2011, the top 20 at the ‘Out Run Autism’ race in Columbus and the top 100 at the ‘St. Patrick’s Day Run’ in Dublin, Cerda says she’s “still not broken.”

“Running is my little outlet,” she said.

A letter from Jerry Wray and Gary Apanasewicz

Dear Colleague:

Communication is important to all of us at ODOT, whether you are in executive management or a member of OCSEA. All of us need to better understand how our co-workers think about the many critical issues we face as a department in order to help us to make better decisions about the future.

As a result, we are encouraging you to participate in ODOT’s Quality of Work Life Survey, which was mailed to your home the first week of January. This anonymous survey will give you the opportunity to express your thoughts about your job satisfaction, your work environment, and the many strategic issues our department faces as we move forward.

The survey will allow us to establish a baseline of employee satisfaction, or even dissatisfaction, with the work environment here at ODOT. Our intention is to conduct a Quality of Work Life Survey annually so that we can measure areas where we are succeeding and areas that need improvement over time.

You will have two options to complete the survey: a hard copy delivered to your home address you can return in a provided, postage-paid return envelope; or online via a web link that will appear on the hard copy. Completing the survey will only take a few moments of your time and will benefit all of us at ODOT.

Members of the Office of Lean and OCSEA union leaders will compile the results together. Again, all responses will be anonymous. Participation is not mandatory. However, we really want to know how you feel about our workplace and our priorities, so we urge you to tell us through this survey.

If you have any questions about the survey, please feel free to contact the Office of Lean at 614-466-4018.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Jerry Wray, Director and
Gary Apanasewicz, ODOT Assembly President
For nearly a year we’ve had the pleasure of travelling the state to meet with Ohioans to talk about our highway system. We have asked people what they would like ODOT and the Ohio Turnpike to do to address our state’s highway budget deficit as we conducted a 10-month, in-depth study of our state’s only toll road as it fits into the bigger transportation picture.

These sessions have been extremely interesting. Everywhere we went, we were told Ohio has tremendous infrastructure needs and a lack of dollars to address those needs. Every city and county we visited has critical pending projects important to their local economy and addressing congestion and safety concerns. We also understand the passionate feelings residents of northern Ohio have for the Ohio Turnpike. It has served them well since 1955.

More importantly, we learned that Ohioans strongly believe our state is on its way back economically. They want us to be innovative in our thinking about complex infrastructure problems. They expect those of us who hold a public trust to work together to find solutions. They have little patience for the partisan gridlock that has unfortunately gripped our federal government in recent years. These are real problems and the people are demanding real, common-sense solutions.

Finding such a real solution to our highway funding deficit was the goal when the Ohio Turnpike study was launched early last year. We began with the recognition that the Turnpike is a high-quality road generating about $260 million in annual revenue. This asset can and should be put to use to help ease Ohio’s highway funding dilemma. We must do so in order to keep our economy moving forward.

We had no preconceived notions. We knew the state of Ohio would keep ownership of the Turnpike under any scenario. There was discussion that the administration was determined to lease the Turnpike. That was only one of the options. The analysis team also looked at the possibility of doing nothing; moving the Ohio Turnpike Commission under ODOT; or keeping the Turnpike Commission an independent agency, but perhaps modifying its duties and relationship with ODOT. There was also much discussion about issuing bonds to raise revenue.

I encourage everyone with an interest in this issue to read the analysis. It is comprehensive and will provide an excellent foundation for continued study of this subject. Members of this administration as well as members of the Ohio General Assembly will find it to be a useful tool for continued discussion of ways to increase efficiencies in operations and save tax dollars.

The state has decided the best course of action is to work with the existing Turnpike Commission to develop a capital plan addressing critical transportation projects by issuing bonds backed by future toll revenues. The Ohio Turnpike will remain under the full control of the State of Ohio. Leasing the Turnpike may have generated more money. However our plan allows the state to maintain total control of the road while expanding the authority of the Turnpike Commission to help build projects that directly benefit the Turnpike and northern Ohio. While a strong majority of the bond money will be spent in northern Ohio, the plan will free up other funds to accelerate badly needed highway projects statewide—delivering more projects faster.

By bonding against future toll revenues we can take a bite out of Ohio’s highway budget deficit and dedicate approximately $1.5 billion for critical infrastructure projects. We can also freeze tolls for 10 years for passenger vehicles using E-ZPass for local trips and cap other toll increases to the rate of inflation for the next decade.

When you’re in a state that makes and grows things, it is essential to have the ability to move those things. This new program will provide vital transportation projects to keep Ohio’s economy moving forward. Ohioans are looking to us to put aside any differences and work together to find innovative solutions to these critical needs. Using the turnpike’s potential, we can keep Ohio’s transportation system moving and keep our state moving as well—back on track to prosperity. ✩
Sometimes we do things the way we do things not because it’s right or because it’s smart, but because we’ve always done it that way. Most people are resistant to change anyway. So why would you question a process that has worked so well all of these years, whatever that process might be? Besides, if you start asking questions you might get the attention of some supervisor or deputy director three counties away who doesn’t even know your name. Better to keep it that way.

When Mike Cope began his first ODOT career in 1977 as a public information specialist in District 11, he was handed a paper timesheet called an AU15 and instructed by a secretary how to fill it out. A few years later, he left the department to pursue other opportunities.

Cope returned to ODOT in the early nineties for a position in Central Office. Again, he was handed an AU15. This time, nobody needed to explain to him how to fill it out. He went on to become a district deputy director and the deputy director of finance. Everywhere he went, he was handed an AU15. In 1996 at an executive management meeting, another district deputy director leaned over the table and told him that the AU15 would soon be history.

“Electronic time-keeping is eminent,” the DDD predicted.

Cope left the department again. He was gone for over a decade. He returned at the beginning of the current administration in 2011 to become the Assistant Director for Business and Finance. On his first day, an assistant handed him an AU15.

“It was like I went back in time. I felt like I was 22 years old again starting as a public information specialist in District 11. It had been almost 35 years and they were still using the same timesheet,” Cope said.

Of course, on the first day of a new administration, ODOT timesheets, however old they are, are usually not a priority for top leadership. They have much more important things to do, like remembering where the rest rooms are located.

And then something happened. During a Central Office meeting of the four divisions that report to Cope, a woman came up and introduced herself. She worked at the warehouse at the West Broad complex. She had some ideas about improving ODOT’s work processes. She invited Cope to visit the warehouse. She mentioned that her job had to do with the AU15 form.

Intrigued, a few weeks later Cope and some of his staff went out to the warehouse. They found the woman scanning box after box of AU15 forms, essentially digitizing the forms for posterity. The woman was three months behind schedule. She and a colleague were also responsible for scanning old microfilm of AU15s into the computer. Meanwhile, her colleague was actually scanning microfilm of road projects from 1936.
into the system. The project was from Ashtabula County.

“I was practically speechless,” Cope said. “Why are we doing this, I asked. Why would we waste so much time on this. Why would we even need these records?”

The woman answered that we’re doing it this way because this is how we’ve always done it. She said this is why she had invited them to visit.

Cope and the rest of the executive management team decided things were going to change. They gave ownership to the department’s deputy directors. The deputy directors appointed a committee of end users, headed by people from information technology and payroll. With the help of the Department of Administrative Service’s Office of Procurement, they undertook a request for proposal process to automate the time keeping process. The result has been the implementation of the Kronos system.

“It took longer than I wanted to finish the implementation because it required hours and hours of training. Sure, it’s not perfect, but it’s better than the old system. We are freeing up our people particularly in the counties to focus more on our core business, maintaining the highway system,” Cope said.

Of course, not everybody has embraced the system. One Central Office manager complained privately that the new system is more trouble than it’s worth. “Kronos has made me a better time keeper, not a better manager. It’s turned everyone into a clock watcher,” she said.

A District 10 employee who works for a district supervisor agrees. “The system has become a burden for supervisors who manage several people. Each day, supervisors take time out of their day to correct an employee’s time or fix an issue with Kronos. The time spent on making sure Kronos is accurate takes away time from actual work being done. Kronos does not help supervisors manage people and work, it simply assists them in tracking time,” she said.

According to Cope, once the Kronos system was fully implemented, there were only four or five errors out of more than 5,000 employee paychecks. “I’m very excited about this. We have removed unnecessary steps that were not value-added. Some people just don’t like change,” he said.

The District 10 employee says the system, which was implemented in June, has yet to prove itself. “The success of Kronos will depend upon how easily we get through snow and ice season. I wonder how many mistakes will be made and how many people will not get paid this winter season because of an error in Kronos,” she said.
“I just wanted to express my appreciation for your preparedness and hard work during yesterday’s winter storm. I drive from Cygnet to Toledo every day and I-75 was completely clear (and dry!) at 6:00 this morning! Well done!”

Jennifer
Cygnet

“Thank you, ODOT! I was expecting a horrible commute from my home in North Olmsted to my workplace on the far east side of Cleveland, but I was surprised to see how clear 480, 71 and 90 were. Thank you for your hard work! I really appreciate it!”

Rebecca
North Olmsted

“I just want to recognize the man who was driving a snow plow on 270 west at 23 north around 1:30 pm today. This man stopped his truck, got out and helped/checked on another person who spun out. When many other people drove right by, he stopped to check on him and place flares near his car. It was a kind gesture and nice to see on a day with very bad weather.”

Carolyn Taylor
Columbus

“... Akron express ways were so clear this morning... I was actually early for work this morning. Please, keep up the good work.”

Luke Kaeka
Uniontown